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Nacionalna agencija Republike Slovenije
za kakovost v visokem šolstvu

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Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

Ensuring Independence, Transparency, and Openness in Quality Assurance: ESG Standard 3.3 and its Implementation in Higher Education

Maja Milas,
Department of Analytics
and Information
Technology

www.nakvis.si

Introduction to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

Adoption Date: The ESG were first adopted in 2005, with a significant revision in 2015.

Purpose: Provide a common framework for quality assurance in European higher education.

Scope: Designed for both higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies.

Commitment: Ensures a shared commitment to quality across European higher education.



Importance of ESG in Higher Education

- **Quality and Transparency:** ESG promote transparency and quality in higher education systems.
- **International Trust:** Independent and objective assessments free from institutional influence.
- **Standardization:** Help establish consistent quality standards while respecting institutional diversity.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Encourage institutions and agencies to commit to ongoing quality enhancement.

**ESG
2015**



Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
in the European Higher Education Area



Key Components of the ESG

- **Part 1 - Standards for Institutions**: Focuses on internal quality assurance within institutions, covering areas like teaching, resources, and support services.
- **Part 2 - Standards for External QA**: Provides guidelines for how agencies should conduct evaluations and accreditations.
- **Part 3 - Standards for QA Agencies**: Ensures that agencies are independent, transparent, and committed to ongoing improvement.

Independence as a Core Value (ESG 3.3)

- **Motivation: Research and Integrity in Quality Assurance**
 - **Commitment to Independence:** Ensuring impartiality in quality assessments is crucial to maintain public trust and the credibility of our agency.
 - **Research Focus:** Independence enables objective research and analysis, providing valuable insights that drive continual improvement in higher education standards.
 - **Transparency in Operations:** By upholding transparency, we foster accountability across all levels of decision-making within the agency.



Key Measures for Openness, Independence and Transparency



- **1. Independence of Evaluation:** QA agencies operate independently to ensure fair assessment of institutions, contributing to a trustworthy educational environment
- **2. Objective Assessments Free from Institutional Influence:** Ensure unbiased evaluations and fair assessments of institutional performance.
- **3. Quality Assurance as Required by ESG 2025:** Acts as an external check to help ensure that institutions are genuinely transparent and open in their operations.
- **4. Strengthening Public Trust and Institutional Integrity:** When quality assurance is independent, transparent, and aligned with open science principles, it creates a feedback loop that builds public trust
- **5. Promoting Ethical Standards in Higher Education:** Adopting policies to uphold ethical standards in research, teaching, and institutional governance.

Key Measures for, Openness, Independence and Transparency



- **6. Comprehensive Conflict of Interest Policy:** Applies to all stakeholders, including staff, council members, appeals committee, and external experts, **zero Tolerance:** strict policies against any form of external pressure or influence on decision-making.
- **7. Awareness and Training Programmes:** **monitoring processs**, operations, conducting risk assessments, and providing training to prevent conflicts of interest.
- **8. Broadening Expert Pool:** Expanding the network of international experts, with a specific focus on experts from regions beyond the Western Balkans, ensuring varied viewpoints in assessments to enhance objectivity and credibility.

Fostering Agency's Independence



- **Legal Framework and Agency Independence:** The Agency's independence is legally supported by the Higher Education Act (ZViS).
 - Article 51e guarantees the Agency's autonomy.
 - Core principles: professionalism, impartiality, legality, political neutrality.
- **Role and Structure of Agency Bodies**
 - The Agency Council and Appeals Committee operate independently.
 - Balanced stakeholder representation prevents dominance by any single interest.
- **Autonomy in Decision-Making**
 - The Agency independently manages accreditation and evaluation processes.
 - Autonomy in selecting methods and experts.
 - Transparency through publicly accessible reports and records.
 - Fostering field of thematic analyses

Mechanisms for Preventing Conflicts of Interest



- **Conflict prevention measures** apply to Agency experts, staff, and stakeholders.
- Declarations of impartiality and conflict exclusion **protocols** are in place.
- Clear **complaint and appeal procedures** support transparency
- Emphasis on **building trust** within Agency operations, stakeholders involvement
- Regular **trainings and awareness-raising** reinforce impartiality.
- Involvement of **international experts** strengthens objectivity.
- Key documents are **translated into English** for foreign experts/stakeholders
- **Collaboration with ENQA, CEENQA, ESU**, and other European agencies.

Conclusion

- **ESG emphasize transparency, quality, and independence** in quality assurance, fostering trust in higher education systems.
- A ESG principles support the **values of accountability and transparency** that align with open science practices.
- Independence in quality assurance ensures objective, **unbiased assessments**, contributing to **public trust** and institutional credibility
- **Transparency in quality assurance operations** promotes accountability, strengthening stakeholder confidence and enhancing the reputation of educational institutions.
- Open science and open access can be **aligned within the ESG framework, but with a well-thought approach.**

Thank you for your attention.

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maja.milas@nakvis.si



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